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EXTRA SATURDAY

REPORT ON ...

Flying high for Olympics

With his sights on gold for the 2010 winter Games, moguls skier Alexandre Bilodeau is launching into training. Page B3

FROM GAZETTE FILES

Gazette francophone music columnist Juan Rodriguez (centre) teaches his UQÀM students how rock 'n' roll is at heart a bastardized hybrid with a history marked by copying, stealing, and the ability to absorb disparate influences. Some of the early pioneers of the genre whose music still resonates today include: (from top left going clockwise) Keith Richards and Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix, French singer-songwriter Serge Gainsbourg, Bob Dylan, Janis Joplin, the Beach Boys, Elvis Presley and the Beatles.

STRIKING A CHORD

Story by JUAN RODRIGUEZ Special to The Gazette

UH-OH, I HADN'T BARGAINED FOR THIS. A sinking feeling – an inexorable psychic quicksand of memory and emotion, pure nostalgia, a return to innocence, an erasure of cynicism – that I hadn't anticipated. And it was too late to stop now.

These thoughts swam through my head two years ago as I delivered my first lecture, in halting French, at a l'Histoire du Rock course I had been asked to teach, on very short notice, at the Université du Québec à Montréal. It was my first crack at teaching. The irony was deafening: I dropped out of college after three months in 1966, mainly to follow rock 'n' roll and write about it. Memories of that neophyte experience came flooding back when I first looked up to see 53 students intently scribbling notes based on whatever disconnected words were stumbling out of my mouth.

The second time I delivered the course, from January to May this year, enrolment had swelled to 90 students eager to learn about the music's milestones from ribald rhythm and blues to ethereal electronica. When I was their age, I was starting out in a new field – rock reviewing – and infused with a sober sense of mission. A dozen years later, I wound up dazed and confused, a victim of too many shows and wretched excess.

More wretched irony: Many of these young people were music students; I had dropped out of ninth-grade music lessons – having been inspired by films of jazz bassists slapping out a beat – after I could no longer endure the excruciating screeches I made practising the cello I was saddled with.

I pondered other factors before taking the plunge as Professeur du Rock. My pre-Bill 101 French is passable, but not fluent to the point of "dancing" with it. Still, rock started as an anglo-American form, I rationalized, so my fractured accent might offer authenticity (including French-language acts in my basic canon – Gainsbourg, Charlebois, Malajube, Pagliaro, Arthur H – didn't hurt either.)

Please see ROCK CLASS, Page B4

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